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Cuyahoga County Office of the Prosecutor

Michael C. O'Malley
Cuyahoga County Prosecutor

Virginia and California Duo Indicted as Part of Voter Intimidation Robocall Scam That Targeted Midwestern Minority Communities

10/27/2020

CLEVELAND – Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley announced that John Burkman, a 54-year-old Virginia man, and Jacob Wohl, a 22-year-old California man, were indicted for devising a robocall scam that attempted to suppress voting in local minority neighborhoods by intimidating residents to refrain from voting by mail.

"The right to vote is the most fundamental component of our nation's democracy. These individuals clearly infringed upon that right in a blatant attempt to suppress votes and undermine the integrity of this election. These actions will not be tolerated. Anyone who interferes with others' right to vote must be held accountable," said Prosecutor O'Malley. "I commend Attorney General Dave Yost and his staff for their diligent work on this investigation. We urge all citizens to get out and vote. Do not let these individuals or others like them succeed. Exercise your right and get out and VOTE!"

On August 26, 2020, Burkman and Wohl utilized a voice broadcasting service provider to place over 67,000 calls across multiple states in the Midwest. Over 8,100 of those calls were sent to telephone numbers located in Cleveland and East Cleveland – over 3,400 of which were answered either by a live person or voicemail. The pre-recorded messages falsely warned people that if they voted by mail that their information could be used by law enforcement, collection agencies, and the Center for Disease Control for the purposes of pursuing old warrants, collecting outstanding debts, and tracking people for mandatory vaccines.

After receiving multiple complaints, the Ohio Attorney General's Consumer Protection Section conducted an investigation and connected the two to the crime. Attorney General Yost applauded Prosecutor O'Malley's quick response to the investigative referral stating, "this outside interference is unacceptable, and the defendants will be held accountable in a court of law."

They have each been indicted on the following charges:

- **Eight counts** of **Telecommunications Fraud**

- **Seven counts** of **Bribery** [1]

Arrest warrants were issued for both defendants upon indictment. They will be arraigned at the Cuyahoga County Justice Center at a later date. If convicted, they face up to a maximum term of 18 ½ years of incarceration

[1] *In the State of Ohio, under Ohio Revised Code 3599.01(A)(2), "Bribery" is defined as "Attempt by intimidation, coercion, or other unlawful means to induce such delegate or elector to register or refrain from registering or to vote or refrain from voting at a primary, convention, or election for a particular person, question, or issue"*

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